

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

every individual animal and plant—does not arise by a natural process of growth, but is created by the favor of God. This view of creation is still often met with in journals, especially in the “births” column. The special talents and features of our children are often gratefully acknowledged to be “gifts of God”; their hereditary defects fit into another theory.

The error of these creation-legends and the cognate belief in miracles must have been apparent to thoughtful minds at an early period; more than two thousand years ago we find that many attempts were made to replace them by a rational theory, and to explain the origin of the world by natural causes. In the front rank, once more, we must place the leaders of the Ionic school, with Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Aristotle, Lucretius, and other ancient philosophers. The first imperfect attempts which they made astonish us, in a measure, by the flashes of mental light in which they anticipate modern ideas. It must be remembered that classical antiquity had not that solid groundwork for scientific speculation which has been provided by the countless observations and experiments of modern scientists. During the Middle Ages—especially during the domination of the papacy—scientific work in this direction entirely ceased. The torture and the stake of the Inquisition insured that an unconditional belief in the Hebrew mythology should be the final answer to all the questions of creation. Even the phenomena which led directly to the observation of the *facts* of evolution—the embryology of the plant and the animal, and of man—remained unnoticed, or only excited the interest of an occasional keen observer; but their discoveries were ignored or forgotten. Moreover, the path to a correct knowledge